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ABSTRACT

Part of an international joint project involving five countries, this report details a 5-year longitudinal, ecological investigation of Swedish families. The study focused on the circumstances and development of children from the time they were 3.5-year-olds until the end of grade 1. The investigation also included national substudies not having any counterpart in the research programs of other participating countries. The main research methods employed were interviews and observations designed to yield information on the following points: family background and changes in the family over time; parental experience of conditions making things easier and more difficult for parents of very young children; the social network of the family; the child's activities (how the child spends his or her day and patterns of social interaction with adults and children in and outside the home); and various aspects of child development. Contacts between homes and preschool institutions and between homes and schools were investigated by means of questionnaires addressed to parents, preschool staff, and teachers. All data were collected between 1978 and 1984, and findings are reported in 30 publications cited at the end of the report. Analyses in progress concern (1) cross-national comparisons of the social networks of mothers; (2) the working situation of parents of young children as related to child development; (3) the different roles of fathers and mothers; (4) family changes over time; (5) children's activities and relations; (6) parental experience of formal support systems; (7) educational patterns and emotional climate; and (8) sex-stereotype socialization between 3 and 7 years of age. No presently available analyses include school data; such analyses will be made during 1984-85 on data obtained through follow-up of background information, questionnaires addressed to grade 1 teachers, questionnaires to parents, interviews with children, and ability tests. (RH)

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AUGUST 1984

FIELD - SUBJECT

1984:6

CURRENT PROJECT

Family support
Parental role
Social network
Childhood environment

TITLE OF PROJECT

FAMILY SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT - a longitudinal, ecological
study of families with children of pre-school and junior-
level age (the FAST-project).

THE FAMILY AND DEVELOPMENT project is the Swedish part of an
international joint project in which five countries (Sweden,
Israel, the UK, the USA and West Germany) are taking part.

The plan is to study parents of very young children in pre-
sent-day modern industrialised societies, with references to
the various national systems of family support.

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What problems and difficulties do parents encounter in their
parental role, and what assistance and support are available
and felt to be needed?

To what extent are support and difficulties connected with
the opportunities which parents have of taking an active
interest in and being together with their children and the
effects which this has on the children's development?

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- 1981:5 H.G. Macintosh. Report on a visit to Sweden
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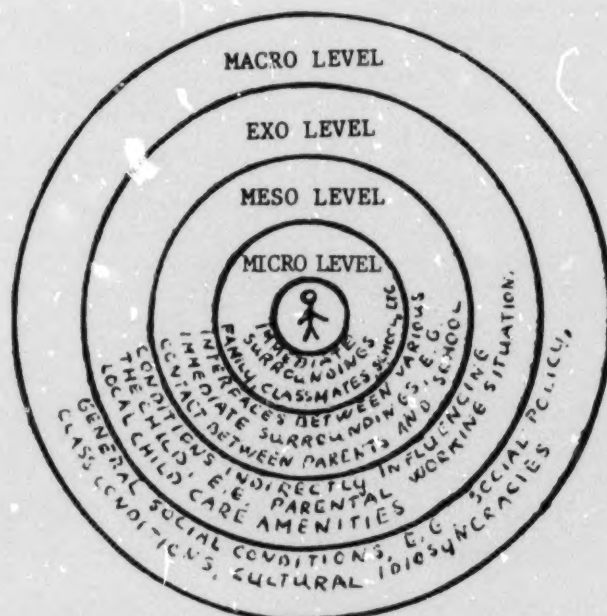
- 1984:1 Children with early perceptual functional disturbances. A follow-up during school years
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- 1984:5 Learning to read

The FAMILY SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT project - a longitudinal, ecological study of families with children of pre-school and junior-level age (the FAST project).

Theoretical premises

The FAST project is theoretically based on the developmental-ecology research model constructed by Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner and presented in his book "The Ecology of Human Development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An exhaustive review, in Swedish, of this research model and of the relation of the FAST project to the theory of developmental ecology will be found in FAST report no. 15 (Andersson, 1982).

Bronfenbrenner regards the developmental process as a function of the interaction between the child and an environment consisting of mutually interactive systems at different levels, termed micro, meso, exo and macro levels respectively.



Closest to the individual we have micro level, which contains several micro systems or immediate surroundings of which the child forms part, e.g. the home, the day care centre and other children living in the same area. Within these environments there develops a pattern of activities, roles and social relations, the three foundation stones of the micro-system, the content of which determines the course and outcome of the developmental process.

The relation between different micro-systems recurs at the next level, meso level. The nature of contacts between home and day care centre can be taken as one example of a system of relations between different immediate environments. The frequency of contact, or overlap, existing between different immediate environments and the differences existing in terms of norms and power relations are examples of factors influencing the several and combined effects of the various immediate environments on the child.

Outside the meso-system level, we have the exo level. This includes, for example, the social-administrative agencies determining the size of groups in day care centres, transport and social planning authorities deciding the shaping of the physical environment, and so on. Parental working conditions are another important factor at exo level. Conditions at this level affect children indirectly, as distinct from the direct influence exerted at micro and meso levels.

The systems described at micro, meso and exo levels, finally, are an expression of the overriding political, cultural, economic and historical conditions prevailing in society. In the model, these systems are located at macro level and supply the frames and potentialities of systems at inferior levels. Bronfenbrenner uses the expression "blueprint" to describe the way in which the macro system is ever-present, influencing and "rubbing off" onto the other system levels.

At the beginning of the project, the two fundamental hypotheses governing the design of the project and five years' collection of data were formulated as follows:

- "1. Children develop through interaction with their surroundings. Their ability to function in different situations outside the home will depend very much on the extent to which parents and other adults participate together with the child in common activities requiring, for example, competence, co-operation and perseverance in order to achieve an objective (e.g. constructing or mending something, looking after somebody, solving a problem, making music, engaging in sporting activities, planning activities, arguing etc.)
2. The prospects of parents developing in their various roles, parenthood included, and having opportunities of taking part in common activities together with their children, depend very much on the extent to which external supportive systems exist for the assistance of parents. Supportive systems of this kind include both institutionalised programmes and services (e.g. financial assistance, health care, parental education, pre-school education) and informal assistance, encouragement and advice from friends, neighbours and others outside the home.

The sample

At the beginning of the project, the Swedish sample comprised 128 families with children. These families were living in eight different housing areas in Stockholm and Göteborg. All the housing areas comprised multi-family dwellings and are of a suburban character. All the families included a boy or girl aged 3½ years whose circumstances and development until the end of grade 1 of compulsory school were the main concern of the project. There were 83 two-parent and 45 single-parent families. There was only one case where the single parent was a father.

It should perhaps be made clear at this stage that when the fifth and final round of data collection for the project was undertaken in May 1984, i.e. after five years' recurrent collections of data, only about 10 families had dropped out of the original survey group.

Methods

The main research methods employed were interviews and observations, designed among other things to yield information on the following points: family background and changes in the family over time, parental experience of conditions making things easier and difficult respectively for parents of very young children, the social network of the

family, the child's activities (how the child spends his day, patterns of social interaction with adults and other children in the home and outside it), and various aspects of child development. Contacts between homes and pre-school institutions and between homes and schools were also elucidated by means of questionnaires addressed to parents, pre-school staff and teachers.

The content and chronology of data collection can be illustrated as follows.

The FAST project: Methods and data collection periods

- | | | |
|------|--------|---|
| 1978 | Year 1 | (Collection of basic data)
Parental interview concerning background data
Parental interview concerning support and impediments affecting parenthood
Parental interview concerning activities of children and families
Parental interview concerning social networks |
| 1979 | Year 2 | Parental interview concerning background data, supplementation, changes
Observations of children
Child assessment (rating scales) (parents, childminders, day care centre staff) |
| 1980 | Year 3 | Parental interview concerning background data, supplementation, changes
Parental interview concerning social support - needs, utilisation, experiences
Parental interview concerning weekend and holiday activities |

- 1982 Year 4 Parental interview concerning background data, supplementation, changes
 Parental interview concerning support and impediments affecting parenthood, supplementation - follow-up
 Parental interview concerning social networks, follow-up
 Child assessment (rating scales) (parents, pre-school teachers)
 Questionnaires to parents and pre-school institutions concerning the content of activities and contacts between homes and pre-school
- 1983-
- 1984 Year 5 Parental interview concerning background data, supplementation, changes
 The child's adjustment to school, teachers' opinions, parental opinions
 Questionnaire to parents and teachers concerning contacts between home and school
 Interviews with children (school - leisure centre - home - the future)

Results

The FAST project publications list, reproduced at the end of this description, currently stands at 30 titles. Most of the reports are theoretical reviews (nos. 1, 10, 15), descriptions of methods development (nos. 2, 5, 6, 20) and descriptions of housing areas (nos. 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21). Presentation of the real results of the investigation begins with report no. 16 (Sandqvist, 1982), describing the social conditions and objective living conditions of the FAST families.

Theoretical premises, methods and interim results of interviews concerning the structure and function of the social network are presented in reports nos. 2 (Gunnarsson, 1978) and 17 (Gunnarsson, 1982). FAST report no. 22 (Gunnarsson, 1984) is entitled "The informal social networks of fathers and mothers". The informal supportive systems

studied in the FAST project include the personal social network, i.e. a parent's contacts with relatives, neighbours and other people in his or her surroundings. This report describes the results of interviews with 166 fathers and mothers in two-parent families in Sweden. In surveying and describing the social networks of these parents of very young children, various aspects of the network are viewed in relation to certain background factors, above all the occupational status of families and the sex of parents.

The network dimensions considered include size, role relationships, variation, location in time and space and the content of relationships. In addition to this presentation of results, the report also includes discussions concerning the place of the network in the development-ecological research model on which the FAST project is based, together with plans for the further analysis of data, in which the degree of instrumental and emotional support from the social network is related to the experience of parental competence, the quality of parent-child interaction and the social development of children.

The project also includes national sub-studies not having any counterpart in the research programmes of the other participating countries. FAST report no. 23, "Holidays of parents of young children - barriers and preferences" (Lassbo, 1984) is one Swedish sub-study of this kind. This report presents the results of interviews and questionnaires involving mothers and fathers of 121 FAST families. The results are presented in accordance with two distinct guidelines. Firstly, holiday behaviour is described as a process variable. In this sense the inquiry is in line with several other sub-studies within the FAST project, their combined aim being to chart the children's reality, and the activities, roles and relations with which they come into contact. The main purpose, however, is to use holiday behaviour as an effect variable. The barriers experienced and preferences developed by families result in a way of life. By delineating part of the family's existence, viz holidays, one can investigate the objective and subjective conditions more generally influencing family behaviour.

In the presentation of results, holiday behaviour is described with respect to (a) formal frames, (b) position in time and space, (c) activities and (d) social relations.

In a section dealing with holiday planning, parents state the extent to which different factors have influenced their choice. The presentation of results ends with a comparison between the real extent of different aspects as perceived by parents and the extent desired.

In the analysis of results, objective and subjective data are compared under the following headings:

Parent-child contact

Social contacts

Freedom of choice/opportunities of influence

Patterns of activity.

Within these fields, the participants in the study are compared in subgroups with respect to type of family (single- or two-parent), occupational status (manual workers or intermediate occupations) and, to some extent, sex and income. The differences between the subgroups are summarised in a concluding section.

The result indicates differences between the groups compared as regards both barriers and preferences. Particular attention is drawn to differences between objective events and subjective experience of the same. These differences are related to the different frames offered by society to different groups and to the different systems of reference in which those frames result.

In FAST report no. 24 (Hägglund, 1984) we approach the children more palpably, for the first time in the presentation of results. Previous results have dealt mainly with the parental situation. This report is entitled "Lively boys and quiet girls" and it presents children's characteristics and social behaviour as described by parents and day care centre staff. The report shows how parents and day care centre

staff, using rating scales, described the children, now aged between 4 and 5 years, during the second year of the FAST project.

The purpose of this report is to show how the adults replied and to analyse variations in their replies in relation to certain background variables, viz the sex of the child, type of family (single- or two-parent), socio-economic level, and attendance or non-attendance at day care centre. The survey group comprised 120 mothers, 79 fathers and 57 pre-school teachers at day care centres.

The presentation of results describes the answers given by mothers, fathers and day care centre staff within the variable fields of the instrument: characteristics of the child, the child's social behaviour, the relationship between the child and the adult, the child's capacity for responsibility and work, its independence, perseverance and cognitive competence. The results show that the answers given by different adult categories were influenced both by the sex of the child and by other background variables.

The report ends with a description of the way in which the results presented here will be followed up by being processed using other instruments in the project.

During the year, the project leader, Bengt-Erik Andersson, chaired a family seminar sponsored by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Industrial Council for Social and Economic Studies. Lars Gunnarsson, the assistant project leader, also took part. The seminar proceedings were summed up at a symposium in September 1983, since when the seminar has among other things produced a book entitled "Family pictures" (ed. Andersson, B-E, 1984). This book includes two chapters dealing with material from the FAST project and included as nos. 25 and 26 in the list of project publications.

A Norwegian book (Bø, "Utvecklingsekologi", in press) includes three chapters of material from the FAST project (references 27, 28 and 29 in the list of project publications), including interim reports concerning family changes, the situation and social networks of single parents, family support and development.

In addition, in a book planned by the NBE under the title "The Junior Level Book", Bengt-Erik Andersson describes the family in present-day society, partly with reference to material from the FAST project (reference no. 30 in the list of publications).

While on this subject, attention can also be drawn to FAST report no. 21 (Sjunnesson, 1984), describing one of the two single-family housing areas included in a parallel study to the FAST project. Grants from the Department of Educational Research at the Stockholm Institute of Education and from the Stockholm Foundation have made it possible to collect data from 24 families with young children in two single-family housing areas in Stockholm. Since the methods and data-collection procedures employed were those of the FAST project, this will present an opportunity of supplementing the project findings with analyses of the situation of families with young children in housing areas of a different type from those included in the FAST project.

Analyses in progress

A large number of data analyses are now being performed by the Göteborg and Stockholm research groups and are expected to result in reports on findings during the present and impending fiscal years. These analyses include the following.

1. Cross-national comparisons of the social networks of mothers

Work on cross-national comparisons of maternal social networks has been in progress for a couple of years now and will result, during spring 1984, in a report presenting findings from interviews of a total of 471 mothers of two-parent families in the USA, West Germany, Wales and Sweden, as well as 91 single mothers

in the USA and Sweden. This report is based on roughly the same model as FAST report no. 22 (Gunnarsson, 1984), except that differences of structure and function between maternal social networks in the four countries are discussed with reference to cultural differences in the design of public family support programmes and norms and values relating to the content of the female role.

Here is an excerpt from the manuscript of the report:

"At the level of culture it is the definition of the woman's role which emerges as an integrating theme, along with several other possible explanatory variables. The networks of Welsh mothers provide us with the most consistent picture of support for the traditional mothering role. Network members are predominantly female, they live close by and they are frequently in touch. Topics of exchange are very child and household centred, with both kin and non-kin. Social and recreational activities are quite restricted to 'other friends', who are few in number... The Swedish data present a picture which is quite different from the Welsh and German, and suggests a woman's role which extends beyond the home and the children to include the workplace and personal leisure-time activities."
(MS in preparation)

2. The working situation of parents of young children related to child development

The main question in this analysis, the empirical foundation of which is derived from the section of the fourth year's stress-and-support interview containing questions about parental employment, concerns the link between the objective and subjectively perceived working situation of parents and the direct and indirect impact of these conditions on parent-child relations and child development.

3. The different roles of fathers and mothers

This analysis begins by asking how the different roles of mothers and fathers are manifested in different kinds of behaviour as regards participation in the care of their own children and in tasks about the house and home, in activities together with the

children and in the utilisation of the social network as a parenthood resource.

4. Family changes over time

One of the benefits of the arrangement of the FAST project is a longitudinal design which makes it possible to describe changes in the background characteristics of families over a five-year period. The stability of families varies with respect to housing area, size of family, family structure, parental employment participation rate, use of child minding amenities etc. The effects of different patterns of change, as well as the causes of change, are being analysed in the course of the project.

5. Children's activities and relations

In the ongoing analyses of children's activities and social relations, use is being made of data collected by means of interviews. In the child and family interview, the activities and relations of the child and parent are charted during an ordinary weekday, while in the weekend interview this information is supplemented by the corresponding data for an ordinary weekend. The purpose of the analysis now in progress is to compare different groups of children (children in single-parent/two-parent families), girls/boys, day care centre children/stay-at-home children, children in working class/white-collar families with respect to the extent and type of different activities and social relations and, in order, at a subsequent stage of the analysis, to view the results in relation to different aspects of the children's development.

6. Parental experience of formal support systems

In the third year's collection of data, mothers and fathers were interviewed concerning their experience and actual utilisation of various societal measures of family support (grants of various

kinds, child care, parental education, parental leave etc.). The answers received in these interviews are now being analysed.

7. Educational patterns and emotional climate

Maternal educational ideologies and problem-solving strategies, as manifested in replies to questions concerning problems of child upbringing and expectations pinned on the child, are being combined in one analysis with the content of the family's common activities, in which connection various intra-family emotional climates are being defined and viewed in relation to certain background characteristics.

8. Sex stereotype socialisation between the ages of 3 and 7 years

The basic topic of inquiry in this analysis concerns the factors of the development-ecological system, apart from the child's sex identity, imparting sex stereotyped content to the child's cognitive and social competence, and the stability of that content between ages 3 and 7. The purpose may be said to be that of describing and analysing content and continuity in children's activities, roles and relations, as well as describing and analysing factors of the development-ecological systems which influence their degree of sex stereotyping on individual reported occasions and over time. Two types of instrument are being used for the analyses. One of these conveys information straight from the children. This has been done on two occasions: by observing the children during the second year's collection of data, and through interviews with the children during the fifth (and present) year. The second type of instrument conveys indirect information about the child through the assessments made by child minders, pre-school teachers and schoolteachers by means of rating scales during the second, fourth and fifth years.

These analyses, and the analyses to be added when the task of collecting data for the project has been completed during spring 1984, will be reported in the series of reports from the project itself and also, in

certain cases, in the form of Ph.D. theses or psychology degree assignments.

The child at school

As has already been made clear, the FAST project is a longitudinal study in which a number of families with young children are being observed over a five-year period, from the time when the children are $3\frac{1}{2}$ years old until they have completed grade 1 of compulsory school. The manifold information concerning the subjective and objective living conditions of the families which is collected during the children's pre-school years will ultimately be viewed in relation to information obtained from teachers and parents as to how the child has coped with the transition and adapted to school, and also in relation to other types of "effect data" collected from the children themselves by means of interviews and tests. Since collection of these data was only completed in May 1984, no analyses are yet available including school data. These analyses will be undertaken during the 1984/85 fiscal year, and so a rather more detailed account of the type of information collected is perhaps called for here.

The data collection procedure was divided into the following five parts:

- (1) Follow-up of background information. As in all previous years, data were collected concerning the objective living conditions of the family, e.g. housing situation, income, employment, child supervision and other assets. These data give us an opportunity of showing the stability/instability of the objective living conditions of families with young children over time, in the present case over a five-year period.
- (2) Questionnaire addressed to the grade 1 teacher concerning
 - a. Contacts between home and school.
 - b. Contacts between school and pre-school.
 - c. Ratings of the child's personal characteristics, development and school achievement.
 - d. The child's adjustment to the school situation.

- (3) Questionnaire to parents covering the following fields
- a. Parental views of the child's progress at school.
 - b. The transition from pre-school to school.
 - c. Parental experience of the school situation.
 - d. Parental contact with school.
 - e. The child and leisure.
 - f. Special questions to parents whose children are attending leisure centres.
- (4) Interview with the child concerning its experience of itself at school, the school situation and other children at school, the leisure centre (where applicable), other children in the housing area, the situation at home and, finally, the child's thoughts concerning the future.
- (5) Ability tests
- Four sub-scales from WIT I (Westrin-Eriksson, 1967) and WISC were selected and used in order to obtain supplementary information concerning the children's vocabulary, word comprehension and inductive capacity.

The collection of these school-related data marked the conclusion of data collection for the project, and analyses and final reporting can now take place. The diversity of data concerning the living conditions of families with young children in Sweden during the late 1970s and early 1980s affords a unique source of information on which it will also be possible to base further follow-ups concerning the future progress of these children on their way through school and into adult life.

Reports from the FAST project

(In Swedish, except where otherwise indicated)

- 1 ANDERSSON, B-E: Family support and development. Research memorandum. Report no. 5/1977 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 2 GUNNARSSON, L: The informal social network as a family-supported function - theoretical premises and a description of methods. Report no. 80/1978 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 3 ANDERSSON, E-E & RYDEN, L: The selection of housing areas for the FAST project. Report no. 80/1979 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 4 HÄGGLUND, S; WICKSTRÖM, U & GUNNARSSON, L: Living in Norra Biskopsgården - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Essay no. 55/1979 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 5 SANDQVIST, K: Parental experience of stress and support - theoretical premises and development of an interview questionnaire. Report no. 3/1979 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 6 KIHBLÖM, U: The child and family activity interview - theoretical premises and development of an interview questionnaire. Report no. 7/1979 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.

Brochure: "The FAST project - one year on", 1979

- 7 BERGMAN, J: Living in Rannebergen - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Essay no. 60/1979 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 8 TÖRNQVIST, A. Living in Sköndal - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Report no. 1/1980 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 9 TÖRNQVIST, A. Living in Norra Bagarmossen - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Report no. 2/1980 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 10 ANDERSSON, B-E: Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology. Invited lecture given at the Conference of the Nordic Association for Educational Research, Göteborg, 23rd-26th October 1980. Report no. 15/1980 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 11 TÖRNQVIST, A: Living in Hagsätra - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Report no. 17/1980 from the

Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.

- 12 TÖRNQUIST, A: Living in Hagsätra - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Report no. 18/1980 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 13 PETTERSSON, N: Living in Norra Backa - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Essay no. 66/1980 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 14 PETTERSSON, N: Living in Östra Lövgärdet - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Essay no. 67/1980 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 15 ANDERSSON, B-E: Developmental ecology. A theoretical frame of reference for studying human development. Report no. 1/1982 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 16 SANDQVIST, K: A description of the FAST families and their social conditions. Report no. 2/1982 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 17 GUNNARSSON, L: The informal social networks of mothers of young children. Interview survey findings. Report no. 117/1982 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 18 ANDERSSON, B-E & SANDQVIST, K: Family Support and Development. A presentation of a Swedish longitudinal research project of families with small children. Reports on Education and Psychology no. 2, 1982. Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
(In English)
- 19 WAGNHED-JAKOBSSON, K & TINDER, C: How parents of young children experience their housing areas and homes - findings from interviews of parents in Rannebergen and Norra Biskopsgården. Essay no. 74/1982 from the Department of Educational Methods, University of Göteborg.
- 20 KIHLEBLM, U: Observations of children in the FAST project - method and preliminary findings. Report no. 14/1982 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
- 21 SJUNNESSON, A-M: Living in Älvesta - a description of a housing area included in the FAST project. Report no. 8/1983 from the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education.
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